

Message Text

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44

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3371

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE GEORGETOWN 1800

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, EPAP, GY

SUBJECT: UNIONS GIVE IN; END SUGAR STRIKE

REF: GEORGETOWN 1695

SUMMARY: THE GOG HAS SUCCESSFULLY ENDED A POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS STRIKE IN THE NATIONALIZED SUGAR INDUSTRY WHICH STILL EXPECTS TO MEET ITS PRODUCTION GOAL OF NERLY 370,000 TONS. THE UNIONS INVOLVED APPARENTLY FAILED TO ATTAIN ANY OF THEIR OBJECTIVES. THE BASIC PROBLEM OF DISTRIBUTING THE INDUSTRY'S WEALTH REMAINS, HOWEVER, AND COULD PROVOKE FURTHER LABOR STRIFE BEFORE THE HARVEST IS OVER. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOG HAS COME OUT ON TOP IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY'S FIRST GENERAL STRIKE SINCE NATIONALIZATION LAST MAY. THE TWO LEADING UNIONS IN THE INDUSTRY, THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP)-DOMI-NATED GUYANA AGRICULTURAL AND GENERAL WORKERS UNION (GAWU) AND THE LEFTIST NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF AGRICULTURAL, COMMERCIAL, AND INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYEES (NAACIE), CALLED OFF THE TWO-WEEK OLD STRIKE ON SEPTEMBER 8 APPARENTLY WITHOUT ATTAINING THEIR OBJECTIVES.

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2. THE MAIN COMPLAINT OF THE UNIONS WQS WHAT THEY CONSIDERED

TO BE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THEIR EAST INDIAN MEMBERS AND IN FAVOR OF BLACK SUPPORTERS OF THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS (PNC) IN MATTERS OF EMPLOYMENT AND PROMOTION. THE UNIONS HAVE NOW AGREED TO A PROPOSAL, WHICH THE STATE-OWNED GUYANA SUGAR CORPORATION (GUYSUCO) HAD OFFERED BEFORE THE STRIKE, TO SET UP AN INVESTIGATORY COMMITTEE TO DETERMINE THE VALIDITY OF VARIOUS UNION CHARGES.

3. GUYSUCO CHAIRMAN, HAROLD DAVIS, HAS INSISTED, DURING CONVERSATION WITH US, THAT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION WAS NOT INVOLVED; HOWEVER, HE SAID HE WANTED TRUSTED MEN IN SUPERVISORY AND MANAGEMENT POSITIONS AND MORE AFRO-GUYANESE FELL IN THAT CATEGORY THAN DID INDO-GUYANESE. NEVERTHELESS, SOME OF THE LATTER WERE BEING PROMOTED. WHAT HE WANTED TO AVOID, HE CLAIMED, WAS THE APPOINTMENT TO KEY POSITIONS OF PPP ACTIVISTS WHO HAD CONSISTENT RECORDS OF OPPOSITION TO THE GOG.

4. ANOTHER GUYSUCO OFFICIAL CREDITED THE CORPORATION'S INTRANSIGENCE ON THE ISSUES AS WELL AS THE UNION'S FALTERING SUPPORT FROM THE WORKERS AS THE REASONS FOR THE STRIKE'S LACK OF SUCCESS. HE NOTED THAT IF THE PRESENT GOOD WEATHER CONTINUES AND IF THERE ARE NO FURTHER LABOR PROBLEMS (HE PREDICTS MORE OF BOTH), GUYSUCO CAN MAKE UP FOR THE LOST DAYS AND STILL ATTAIN ITS GOAL OF 368,000 TONS.

5. COMMENT: DESPITE THE STRIKE'S THREAT TO GUYANA'S INCREASINGLY FRAGILE ECONOMY (SEE REFTTEL), GUYSUCO REMAINED FIRM IN SUPPORT OF ITS PRINCIPLES. GAWU, WHICH SOME OBSERVERS FELT WAS NEVER REALLY IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION, DISPLAYED ITS OWN WEAKNESS BY ITS INABILITY TO MAINTAIN WHAT BECAME AN APPARENTLY FRUITLESS STRIKE. THE BASIC PROBLEM OF DISTRIBUTING THE SUGAR INDUSTRY'S WEALTH (THROUGH JOBS, PROMOTIONS, BONUSES, ETC;), HOWEVER, HAS NOT BEEN SOLVED AND IS LIKELY TO SURFACE AGAIN IN THE FORM OF ANOTHER SUGAR STRIKE BEFORE THE HARVEST IS OVER
BLACKEN

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